

MEDfacts

An Educational Health Series From National Jewish Health®



Staying Tobacco Free

To help you stay tobacco free, read through these resources about ways to cope with stress, cravings and relapses.

- **Coping with Stress**
Learn about ways to cope with stress when quitting tobacco.
- **Rewarding Yourself**
Learn how to reward yourself through the quitting process.
- **Slip Tracker**
Use the Slip Tracker to figure out strategies to prevent future slips.

Coping with Stress when Quitting Tobacco

Managing stress is one of the most important tools that you can learn to help you quit and improve your health.

What is Stress?

Stress is your reaction to any change that requires you to adjust or respond. It's important to remember that you can learn to control stress, because stress comes from how you respond to stressful events. Stress is something that everyone experiences. Too much stress can lead to a variety of problems, such as headaches, insomnia, body aches and pains, overeating, under-eating, upset stomachs and weakened immune systems.

Our bodies are designed to feel stress and react to it. It keeps us alert and ready to avoid danger. It is not always possible to avoid or change events that may cause stress. The key to coping with stress is identifying stressors in your life and learning ways to direct and reduce stress.

Quitting Can Be Stressful

Quitting tobacco is a huge change! It is very natural to feel stress as you transition into not using tobacco. Be kind to yourself and learn to recognize the signs of stress. Stress signs can be physical, emotional or both.

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Once you can identify these signs, you can learn how your body responds to stress and take steps to reduce it. Your body sends out physical, emotional and behavioral warning signs of stress. The lists below include stress signs to be aware of:

Emotional warning signs include:

- Anxiety
- Sleep disruption
- Anger
- Inability to concentrate
- Unproductive worry
- Sadness
- Frequent mood swings

Physical warning signs include:

- Stooped posture
- Sweaty palms
- Chronic fatigue
- Weight gain or loss
- Physical symptoms that your doctor cannot attribute to another condition

Behavioral warning signs include:

- Overreacting
- Acting on impulse
- Using alcohol or drugs
- Withdrawing from relationships
- Feeling agitated most of the time
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How to Cope with Stress

There are many things you can do to deal with stress. Breathing and relaxation strategies are proven to be very effective in helping deal with stress.

- [Diaphragmatic Breathing](#)
- [Meditation](#)
- [Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#)

Rewarding Yourself when Quitting Tobacco

Learning to reward yourself for the changes you are making in your life is an important part of quitting tobacco.

Why Rewards Are Important

You are taking important steps to improve your life. The changes you are making take a lot of time and energy. People are motivated by different rewards, so it is important to think about how you can reward yourself. Knowing what is motivating and rewarding to you will help you continue to be successful in meeting your goals.

Rewards can sometimes be difficult to complete. There can be a sense that rewards are not important or rewards are only deserving when the goals have been fully accomplished. However, rewards are an important part of the behavior change process. So it is crucial to think of rewards as necessary to maintaining the changes you are making in your life.

You may find that using different size rewards for different goals is helpful. For instance, you may want to reward yourself in a small way for meeting a goal in a day or in a week, but maybe you want to set up a bigger reward for a month of meeting your goals and perhaps an even bigger reward for a year of meeting your goals.

How to Use Rewards

The following is a list of practical tips for using rewards in quitting tobacco:

- Decide ahead of time what your rewards will be so that you are motivated by them
- Know exactly what you need to do to earn your reward
- Set reasonable goals for yourself
- Don't give yourself a reward until you determine that you earned it
- Set varying time frames for accomplishing your quitting goals, such as:
 - 1 week
 - 1 month
 - 3 months
 - 6 months
 - 1 year

Reward Ideas

The following is a list of possible reward ideas, both big and small. Remember it is only a reward if it is rewarding to you. So if nothing on this list seems rewarding, then come up with some of your own ideas.

- Take a walk
- Go out to dinner
- Watch a movie
- Ask your family (or friends) to treat you as a king/queen for a day
- Get a massage
- Take a long bath
- Save the money you were using on tobacco products for a bigger purchase
- Create an award certificate for yourself (if you have children, they might like to help with this)

Tobacco Slip Tracker

If you have been quit for some time (a few weeks), a slip is brief slip back to using tobacco. A relapse is return to regular tobacco use patterns.

It's OK if you slip. Many people slip and still go on to become life-long non-smokers! How you handle a slip is very important and can get you back on track quickly. Create a Slip Tracker to give you clues about what you need to do differently.

Remember, a slip is information. It tells you that your coping skills are not developed enough

For example, if you slipped when you went to have cocktails with friends, this tells you the situation is risky for you. Alcohol combined with being around friends who smoke, this is a situation that will make you break. Think about what you were feeling... think about the thoughts you were having. Finally, come up with more coping skills. Are you going to Avoid the situation, Alter it in some way, or find more Alternatives, such as nicotine gum, lozenges, straws, mints, hard candies or toothpicks to keep your mouth busy?

Example Slip Tracker

Situation I slipped	What was I feeling?	What was I thinking about? Did I forget to use Positive Self-Talk?	What new 3 A's coping skills am I going to use?
Having drinks with friends. Friends were smoking.	Happy, having fun, felt tipsy	Thought I could have just one and then go back to quitting	I am going to avoid going out for drinks a while longer. If I do go out, I will have nicotine gum or lozenges handy if I have cravings.
Stressed out	Cranky, upset	Thinking, "Everything is bad. I am miserable."	I am going to work on my Positive Self-Talk and think, "Even if things are not perfect, this will pass. Smoking is not going to solve my problems. It will only make me feel worse." I am going to use more Alternatives: Twizzlers, carrot sticks, popsicles.

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